



Appendix I
Associate Director
Memorandum: Sustainable
Redevelopment Function
in Disaster Field Offices,
November 1998



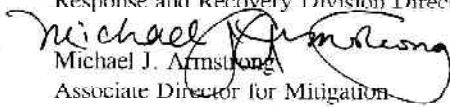
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Washington, D.C. 20472

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Regional Directors
Regions I-X

ATTENTION: Mitigation Division Directors
Response and Recovery Division Directors

FROM: 
Michael J. Armstrong
Associate Director for Mitigation

SUBJECT: Sustainable Redevelopment Function in
Disaster Field Offices

The purpose of this memorandum is to share with you an important new initiative of the Mitigation Directorate--the establishment of a *sustainability desk* as part of the mitigation function in Disaster Field Offices (DFOs) and/or Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs). I would like to provide you some brief background, outline an approach to developing and piloting this concept, and, most importantly, solicit your participation in this effort.

What is sustainability?

The concept of sustainability brings a relatively new approach to environmental, economic, and social thought, and has the potential to enhance the achievement of mitigation goals in the post-disaster (as well as pre-disaster) environment. While there is no universal definition for sustainability, a definition that may be most useful for our purposes is the following (based on language from the Minnesota State Legislature):

...development that maintains or enhances economic opportunity and community well being while respecting, protecting and restoring the natural environment upon which people and economies depend.

What is sustainable re-development?

Sustainable re-development is simply the application of the concepts and practices of sustainable development to the disaster recovery process. As the post-disaster environment presents a unique window of opportunity to implement hazard mitigation measures, it may also provide the same window of opportunity to reduce human conflict with natural systems, reduce the consumption of non-renewable resources, and increase the quality of the built environment. If reconstruction is part of a community's disaster recovery process, the community may also have the opportunity to address issues such as the compatibility of development with the natural environment and natural hazards, use of non-renewable resources, and social and economic issues that may be affected by improved community planning and physical design.

Like sustainable development itself, sustainable re-development is locally driven and consensus based. After the Midwest Floods of 1993, as many of you are aware, FEMA worked closely with a public-private partnership group called the Working Group on Sustainable Re-development to assist Valmeyer, IL and Pattonburg, MO, two severely damaged communities, determine how to incorporate sustainability into their recovery efforts. A package of assistance was made available to these communities that resulted in multiple benefits: removal of damaged structures from the floodplain; relocation of residents, businesses and community facilities to safer, more sustainable locations not vulnerable to flooding; the incorporation of cost-effective, energy-efficient technology into rebuilt or new structures; and neighborhoods designed to improve the quality of everyday life for their residents.

Building on this experience, participants (including myself) in the 1998 Wingspread Conference, "Communities in Harm's Way: Leadership Dialogue on Designing Disaster-Resistant Settlements," developed a set of principles to help communities and government agencies enhance sustainability in disaster-prone communities. These "Wingspread Principles," which may be found on the Internet in both websites referenced at the end of this memorandum, provide a vision of using the disaster recovery process as an opportunity to create more sustainable communities. I believe that the time is right for FEMA to actively assist States and communities to realize this vision.

Sustainability Desk

The term *sustainability desk* is shorthand for activities undertaken by FEMA, in partnership with the State and through coordination with other agencies and organizations (Federal or non-Federal), to promote integration of the principles and practices of sustainable development into the post-disaster recovery process. There may or may not be an actual desk in the DFO or the disaster recovery centers, at which an individual works or distributes publications. The nature of the sustainability initiative in any given disaster will depend on the particular recovery needs that must be met, and will be determined by the Region, FCO and Deputy FCO for Mitigation (DFCO-M). The activities FEMA, in conjunction with other Federal agencies, undertakes to encourage and support State and local governments to implement sustainable redevelopment will be under the authority of the DFCO-M or the Hazard Mitigation Officer, as part of the overall mitigation strategy for the disaster. The connection with mitigation is obvious: a disaster resistant community is far more sustainable than a community that is vulnerable to repeated disaster losses, and sustainability provides a holistic framework for communities to link mitigation to other broad goals.

The Mitigation Directorate intends to develop guidance and suggested procedures for the Regional Offices on Sustainable Redevelopment, in coordination with the Response and Recovery Directorate; other Federal agencies such as the Department of Energy (DOE), Environmental Protection Agency, and Department of Housing and Urban Development; and the National Emergency Management Association and Association of State Floodplain Managers. However, practical experience is invaluable to this process. Therefore, we have begun to take advantage of some disasters as they occur to pilot sustainability efforts. These efforts have occurred in Ohio

and West Virginia, and we anticipate integrating sustainable redevelopment into the recovery from future disasters as appropriate opportunities present themselves.

Pilot Efforts

In Ohio (FEMA-DR-1227-OII), FEMA supported the State's *Smart Recovery* initiative promoting flood mitigation with a number of sustainability activities. The headquarters Program Planning Branch arranged for the DOE's Denver Regional Support Office to provide an individual to assist and provide technical assistance to FEMA and State staff at the DFO. A Sustainable Redevelopment Steering Committee was established, composed of representatives of the Ohio Emergency Management Agency (OEMA), the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) and FEMA. The Committee developed an action plan, including minimum criteria for the selection of target communities, and identified potential target communities. OEMA hosted representatives from Federal and State agencies as well as local planning commissions and universities at a DOE presentation on "Sustainable Disaster Recovery." The audience learned about "what" Sustainability is, "how, where and when" it can be applied, "who" can utilize it and "why" it is critical. The session was very well received, and these organizations should be prepared to play a role in assisting target communities to make sustainable redevelopment part of their flood recovery.

FEMA and OEMA facilitated a meeting with Rural Action, an advocacy group already involved with Sustainable Development in Athens County, in order to identify some of the activities currently taking place to maintain/increase the sustainability of the communities in the area. This effort led the DOE to provide a \$5,000 grant to Rural Action to support increased activity related to sustainable redevelopment in the area.

Region V is adapting the DOE Sustainable Development presentation to develop a new presentation that will include additional slides focusing on mitigation. They are also creating a Concept Summary (documenting the Sustainability Desk effort in Ohio for DR-1227), a Resource List, a Publications Inventory, a Community Newsletter and a tri-fold Sustainability Brochure. We will provide you with copies of these materials when they are available.

In West Virginia (FEMA-DR-1229-WV), conversations between the Governor and Director Witt resulted in a commitment to develop a long-term recovery plan, and both the State and FEMA determined that it would be appropriate to include sustainable redevelopment in the plan. Region III, working with the State, developed a Sustainability Action Plan with recommendations of activities and responsibilities for FEMA headquarters and regional offices and State agencies. They have also contacted several communities and organizations to provide information on sustainable redevelopment, and have made contact with a number of the regional planning commissions in the State. Some of Region III's other activities in WV include drafting a standard operating procedure for a Sustainability Officer, collecting sustainability material for use in future disasters, and identifying a number of procedural and substantive questions which need to be addressed as part of FEMA's future sustainable redevelopment guidance.

Next Steps

The Mitigation Directorate's Program Planning Branch has the responsibility of developing operational policy and procedures that will eventually guide FEMA's implementation of sustainable redevelopment in the post-disaster environment. Discussions with DOE have identified a number of activities that can assist us in this effort, including press kits, PSAs, videos, and articles for the Recovery Times promoting sustainable redevelopment.

We need your assistance, as you respond to future disasters, to pilot some sustainable redevelopment efforts with communities that you and the State believe would be receptive to this initiative. Please contact the Planning Branch both to discuss the appropriateness of this effort to your situations, and to obtain technical assistance. We can support you with experts from other Federal agencies, and publications and other materials. Lessons learned from recent experience in Ohio and West Virginia, as well as other sustainable redevelopment efforts, can help you in considering how to approach this initiative:

- It's important not to introduce sustainable redevelopment too early, when States and communities are completely absorbed with immediate response. But we need to discuss it as soon as they start thinking about recovery, and provide information and technical assistance to interested communities as soon as we can. Ideally, we should be looking for avenues to introduce sustainability in the pre-disaster mode.
- People who may not initially be receptive to the idea of sustainable redevelopment often, over a few days or weeks, come to see its benefits. We need to allow for this "fermentation period," and test the waters periodically during the early recovery phase.
- FEMA has a key role to play, as the most visible Federal presence, in publicizing sustainable redevelopment during the critical window of opportunity to introduce new approaches to recovery.
- The people left behind in the community after the Federal presence is gone accomplish the real work of sustainable redevelopment. Our job is to enhance their capability by providing information, contacts, and technical assistance through the DFO, and by following up from the Regional Office as the situation and resources dictate.
- The multi-objective community based planning that defines Project Impact communities is a natural spring board for sustainable redevelopment in a post-disaster environment. I encourage you to introduce this in your Project Impact discussions.

My intent with pilot efforts is two-fold: first, to avoid situations in which the current absence of formal guidance prevents us from seizing opportunities that may exist to promote sustainable redevelopment, and second, to obtain useful information and more "lessons learned" that will contribute to the development of policy and procedures for encouraging sustainable redevelopment during disaster recovery.

I sincerely appreciate your support for this initiative. We will be sharing additional material and information with you, and your input and feedback will be essential as we proceed. Please feel free to contact me or Terry Baker in the Program Planning Branch (202-646-4648) if you have questions or wish to discuss this initiative further. In addition, if you are interested in learning more about the concept, principles, and specific aspects of sustainable redevelopment, these two DOE websites will provide you with excellent information, ranging from introductory to more technical: <http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/> and <http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/freshstart/>.

cc: Lacy Suiter, Response and Recovery
Mitigation Division Directors and Branch Chiefs, Headquarters